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Aggressive C.I.A. Chief

William Joseph Casey

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WASHINGTON, April 18 — As debate over the United States involvement in the mining of Nicaraguan harbors has grown in recent weeks, William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, has become the central figure in the dispute.

Man Although the mining
in the was recommended by an
News interagency committee
and approved by President Reagan, Administration officials have said the operation was ultimately Mr. Casey's project from inception to execution. They said it was a quintessential reflection of Mr. Casey's aggressive, action-oriented leadership and determination to confront what he believes to be Communist subversion in Central America.

The resulting furor with Congress, the officials said, was also a reflection of Mr. Casey's combative personality and strong aversion to Congressional monitoring of intelligence operations.

When Mr. Casey assumed office as Director of Central Intelligence in 1981, a job that gives him broad authority over all the Government's intelligence-gathering agencies as well as direct responsibility for the management of the Central Intelligence Agency, he told colleagues he wanted to keep the C.I.A. and himself out of the news. It has not worked out that way. Now and at other times during his tenure, Mr. Casey has often been at the center of highly charged disputes.

Managed Reagan's Campaign

Even before taking office, Mr. Casey was attacked by members of Congress as an unsuitable choice to run the nation's intelligence agencies because he had been the manager of Mr. Reagan's 1980 campaign.

Midway through 1981, Mr. Casey's judgment was questioned when Max C. Hugel, the man he had appointed to manage the C.I.A.'s clandestine operations, resigned after former business associates accused him of violating securities laws. Mr. Hugel denied the accusation and his accusers dropped out of sight after becoming the subjects of a Federal criminal investigation. Mr. Hugel was never charged by any state or Federal agency.

Then, Mr. Casey's personal finances came under scrutiny and Senator Barry Goldwater, Republican of Arizona, the chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, called for his resignation. The committee was concerned about financial holdings that Mr. Casey had failed to report before his confirmation hearings. Mr. Casey said he had inadvertently failed to disclose all of his holdings at the time.

Questioned on Carter Papers

More recently, Mr. Casey has been questioned by the Federal Bureau of Investigation about his role in the Reagan campaign's acquisition of material from the Carter White House during the 1980 campaign. Mr. Casey has denied any involvement, although recently published memorandums written by Reagan campaign aides in 1980 suggested that he was at least aware that information was being obtained from the Carter re-election organization.

The current dispute over the harbor mining, like some earlier conflicts with Congress, appears to stem in part from Mr. Casey's combative personality and concerted efforts to make the C.I.A. an active participant in Mr. Reagan's assertively anti-Soviet foreign policy.

While many intelligence officials give Mr. Casey credit for obtaining large budget increases for the C.I.A. — financing for the agency has increased at a rate of nearly 25 percent a year since he took office — and improving the quality and timeliness of analytical reports, he has been criticized for damaging relations with Congress and leading the C.I.A. into risky covert operations, including the support of Nicaraguan rebels.

In Conflict With Legislators

His distrust of Congress is legendary at the C.I.A. and in the Senate and House intelligence committees, where Mr. Casey's frequent appearances often deteriorate into angry exchanges with lawmakers. Mr. Casey, according to current and former colleagues, has held the Congressional committees in contempt since members first questioned his qualifications and then investigated his personal finances.

His affinity for covert operations is equally well known. Drawing on interests he first developed during World War II when he was a top official of the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor to the C.I.A., Mr. Casey has encouraged a resumption of the kind of covert activities that went out of favor in the late 1970's.

Sometimes bypassing senior agency officials to run operations himself with the aid of middle-level operatives, Mr. Casey, according to intelligence officials, has traveled to Honduras and El Salvador in unmarked, private planes to check on support for the Nicaraguan rebels.

Wealth Put at Over \$9 Million

William Joseph Casey was born in Elmhurst, Queens, on March 13, 1913. After graduating from Fordham University he studied law at the St. John's University School of Law and went into private practice, beginning a career as a lawyer and entrepreneur, primarily as a venture capitalist, that has given Mr. Casey a personal net worth that exceeds \$9 million, according to his financial disclosure statements.

He and his wife, Sophia, have been married for more than 40 years and have one daughter, Bernadette, an actress in New York. The Caseys own large estates in Washington and Palm Beach and on Long Island.

During the Nixon and Ford Administrations, Mr. Casey served as chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs and President of the Export-Import Bank.

Last week as Mr. Casey was shown

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